Tells the Facts and Names the Names

$2.50

CounterPunch

November 16 / 30, 2006 *Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair* VOL. 13, NO. 20

Robert Gates and the New Union Army

By Greg Moses

With the Robert M. Gates nomination as Secretary of Defense steaming fast toward the Pentagon from Texas A&M, College Station, Texas (Gates' recent perch as president), we have new reasons for concern about the militarization of the U.S. border with Latin America. With National Guard troops now standing watch on the U.S. side of the border, narco-gang wars in Mexico are becoming more flagrant, and Congress continues to slacken long-standing *posse comitatus* restrictions on the use of military forces for domestic law enforcement duties.

To be sure, the *posse comitatus* prohibitions (stemming from backlash against the activities of Union troops in the South after the Civil War) had already been circumvented in practice by the time that governors of the four southwestern border states signed onto "Operation Jumpstart" this past June. As part of their Memoranda of Understanding with the Pentagon, the governors had agreed to give the Secretary of Defense power to activate Guard troops for law enforcement purposes, even as everyone promised that law enforcement would not be the object of their so-called temporary border mission.

In a December article for *Air Force Magazine*, James Kitfield writes from Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado, that the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) "has assumed a more prominent role in the homeland than at any time in this country's modern history. In fact, NORTHCOM is the physical embodiment of a military presence on American soil that would have once seemed unthinkable."

Military intervention into border pa-

(**Gates** *continued on page 4*)

Libération and the Evolution of Neoliberalism in France

By Pierre Rimbert

Now that it has become fashionable to mourn the probable demise of an "irreverent" (some would even say subversive) French daily newspaper, *Libération* – or, at any rate, the demise of its editorial independence (symbolized by the firing of its editor Serge July by Edouard de Rothschild, a financier with ties to Nicolas Sarkozy), Pierre Rimbert's recent book *Libération, de Sartre à Rothschild* constitutes a useful corrective to myths about *Libération*. Despite *The Nation's* recent bizarre description of *Libération* as serving "the extreme left", in fact, it has been ages since *Libération* was irreverent, except when scoffing at the workers, the poor and the dominated classes in general. And while this daily paper is indeed now in the hands of the financial establishment, this has nothing to do with either a "falling out" between Serge July and Edouard de Rothschild or a show of force on the part of the banker. Rather, it is the culmination of a process that began in May 1981, with Serge July in the starring role before becoming this story's collateral casualty. Pierre Rimbert's book recounts the sad history of *Libération*, founded in 1973 by Jean-Paul Sartre to "bring the word to the people", only to become the laboratory of the Left's metamorphosis – i.e., its conversion to "neoliberalism" in the 1980s – and the provide the curtain of cultural audacity behind which the Left's conformity to the ideals of free market capitalism is dissimulated. In addition to providing an analysis of what is in fact a textbook case, Pierre Rimbert's excellent book examines the wellsprings of a conservative revolution in French intellectual life, putting the current agony of "Serge July's daily" into proper perspective. *Editors.*

First, some rhetorical markers in the editorial career of Citizen Editor July:

"May '68 placed the revolution and the class struggle once again at the center of all strategy. Without wanting to play the prophet, the revolution will hit France around '70 or '72." (Serge July, 1969)

Today, the true subversion is information. That's the only ideology that interests me any more. (Serge July, 1981)

The real rupture is claiming to be liberal in the eighteenth century sense of the term. (Serge July, 1986)

Personally, I am for neoliberalism. Personally, I am all for competition. (Serge July, 2002)

Everything has been good for me. (Serge July, 1985)

When he retired in April of 1907, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* founder Joseph Pulitzer laid down the fundamental principles that his successors must observe to ensure that his daily would set the standard in American journalism. The newspaper would "always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always remain devoted to the public welfare…" At the time, pockets of resistance to capitalism were multiplying in the Western world: workers' councils in Russia, Industrial Workers of the World in the U.S.A., CGT in France. Their lofty goal was to destroy paid employment/wage slavery/the alienation of labor.

A Left that wanted to change the world; a press with a sense of social justice. This tandem has been unable to withstand the political, economic and intellectual winds of the last thirty years. When it comes to power, the Left just

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keeps the existing system ticking over. When it takes a position, the press justifies the world as it turns.

Founded in 1973 "to give the people a voice", and finally sold off in chunks to Édouard de Rothschild, the newspaper *Libération* itself offers a telling glimpse of how these changes have marked France. In the beginning, a feisty editorial endeavor declares war on the mainstream press. "*Libération* will fight against complacent, groveling journalism", in the words of its November 1972 manifesto. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Libération*'s first editorial director, spelled out what achieving this lofty goal meant: "We have refused to become an industrial and commercial undertaking". In the end, *Libération* has become a corporation, whose board of directors in 2005 included an investment banker, a former CFO of Vivendi, the former executive director of the Davos World Economic Forum, and a Suez senior executive who was also once Édouard Balladur's press agent. As Édouard de Rothschild explained on French television (France 2, September 30, 2005), "I think it is rather utopian to want to separate the editorial side and the shareholder."

Skimming the pages of this dreary daily, which has been largely shoved aside by France's exploding free press, it is hard to imagine the ideological role that *Libération* played in the 1980s. It did for France's cultural bourgeoisie what *Commentary* did for America's neoconservatives, providing a dressing room where they could try on the free market attitudes that France's socialist government began sporting sometime around 1983-1984. "Indeed, Mitterrand's greatness, as Serge July put it shortly after, was to have 'succeeded in aligning France's democracy with the Anglo-Saxon model and in making its domestic economy bow to the will of global market forces.' "

Editors
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

Assistant Editor
Alevtina Rea

Business
Becky Grant
Deva Wheeler

Counselor
Ben Sonnenberg

Published twice monthly except one in July & one in August, 22 issues a year

CounterPunch.
All rights reserved.
CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
1-800-840-3683 (phone)
counterpunch@counterpunch.org

The about-face of an anti-establishment figurehead may appear banal. In Italy, Marco Panella (former chairman of an international libertarian party) rallied behind Silvio Berlusconi. Christopher Hitchens, formerly a journalist-spokesman for the American Left, took a turn to the right that began with the war in Kosovo and led to a show of support for George W. Bush published in the *Wall Street Journal.* In Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, a theoretician in the war against imperialism and for the autonomy of third world economies, morphed into an orator for development through free trade before becoming a neoliberal president. Against these examples of individual flip-flops, *Libération* offers a different example in France – one of collective normalization. After serving post-May '68 as a haven for social struggle, in 1981 it became the organic expression of gentrification, the organ of "plugged-in" conservatism. Journalists and readers walked hand in hand along the path to social old age, their material interests carrying them into the realm of economic conformity, their cultural interests running toward the eccentric. *Libération* offered this readership an ideological safe house that was all the more cozy in that these conversions could unfold behind the sheltering curtain of artistic audacity and stale sexual "transgressions." In 1986, Guy Hocquenghem described the typical modus operandi of the false avant-garde: "The key is to keep just enough behind the curve to coincide with the general reaction".

Obviously, *Libération* was not the only force staging this huge reversal. No matter how convinced one already is of the media's responsibility in selling the neoliberal credo to the masses, one cannot help but be floored by what press archives from Mitterrand's first term of office reveal. Here, a parade of business leaders, writers and editorialists grace the television studios with their presence, enjoining their fellow citizens to get with the program of the new economic order; there, left-leaning publications like *Le Nouvel Observateur, Globe* or *L'Événement du Jeudi* putting a new gloss on the equations of a modernity that is half a century old: free trade = pragmatism, trade union = archaism, collective ownership = bankruptcy. And just as there was once a time for socialist pragmatism, the springtime of liberal pragmatism is upon us. It worships the boss, celebrates the cult of the corporation, sings the praises of individual success and blames the worker, huddled defensively over his hard-won rights and privileges.

But to fulfill Serge July's wish – that of making *vive la crise!* (long live the crisis!) a watchword of the people – these old saws had to be patched up using the futuristic colors of progress. The radiant future would be a computerized global network.

These years have also changed the press. As they extended their economic scope, the big communication groups formed out of the privatization of the audio-visual landscape have tightened their grip on how the political game is represented, to such an extent that the political parties have stopped reacting to the concentration of the means of information that threatens to leave its mercantile mark on the whole of society. Between the spring of 2004 and the summer of 2005, France's three leading dailies underwent major changes involving their shareholders, against a backdrop of relative indifference: *Le Figaro* was bought out by Dassault, *Libération* was recapitalized by Rothschild, and the media conglomerate Lagardère injected money into *Le Monde*.

Break the taboos: a cohort of former leftists was all the more willing to adopt this watchword in that it served nicely to cover up their abandonment of past conquests with the makeup of subversion. As Guy Hocquenghem noted on the set of the television program "Apostrophes" in 1986, "Today's taboos are the subversive ideas of May '68. And breaking down taboos basically means making it easy for people to hold even more reactionary positions, i.e. those dating from before May '68." Before breaking the taboos of social security, free trade, imperialist war and profit, *Libération* cut its teeth on the advertising taboo. For a publication whose manifesto stated, in part, "There will be no advertising because by financing the press,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

advertisers also run it and censor it", this was a big chunk to bite off.

After the idea was approved in the fall of 1981, advertising appeared in the pages of *Libération* for the first time on February 16, 1982. In the interval, Jacques Séguéla had been urging Serge July to cross the Rubicon: "Advertisers are falling all over themselves. You'll be the Decaux * of the daily press. Galvanized by this prospect, the editor of *Libération* wrote a series of prophylactic articles intended to brush aside the misgivings of a "simplistic" readership. No, *Libération* was not giving in to the temptation to normalize – indeed, it was "advertising that is becoming definitively 'normalized' by appearing in the pages of *Libération*". No, *Libération* was not changing, it was "advertising [that] has changed." Advertising is an art. "To such an extent," added July, "that we no longer really know where culture begins and where advertising leaves off." Without it, *Libération* was "incomplete", because "new social values have made their mark, crossing those for which advertising is a predisposed means. For example, the return of the 'esprit d'entreprise' at the end of the 1970s. And on the day *Libération* published its first page of advertising, July exhorted the captains of industry: "Be inventive. We would love [...] it if advertisers joined us in making the leap of creation, audacity and provocation" (February 16, 1982). Back in October 1975, and not for the first time, July poked fun at *Le Nouvel Observateur* by tallying up the number of pages that this weekly sold to advertisers.

With the arrival of advertising, readership acquired a bona fide financial value. It was no longer just a question of selling a newspaper to readers, but of selling readers back to advertisers. As a March 30, 1982, supplement directed at the latter made clear, "advertising in *Libération* is primarily directed at those who make and break trends [...] 70,000 readers of talent who shape public opinion". But the advertisers were wary nonetheless: were these "readers of talent" affluent enough to justify paying for a single-page ad priced, incidentally, well above the going rate? *Libération* commissioned the market research firm Sofres to draw a thumbnail sketch of its target audience. This audience turned out to be made up of "young, active, competent, educated, civic-minded people, well-off in affluent households and, when they make investments or purchases or use things, they tend to focus on leisure pursuits." Six out of ten *Libération* readers in 1982 were university graduates, five times the national average; one-fourth were members of the "business people and top managers" socio-economic category – rising to 40 per cent in 1987 – compared with less than one in ten of their fellow French citizens. What came next delighted the advertisers. According to the Sofres survey, 54 per cent of *Libération*'s readers owned a "camera with an interchangeable lens". Better still: 30 per cent owned a "lighter that retails for 500 francs or more", while 30 per cent owned a "pen that costs 250 francs or more", over 56 per cent possessed a "stereo set valued at 3,000 francs or more". And 1.3 per cent owned "a sail or motor boat measuring more than 20 feet"."A market to conquer", urged the booklet that was swiftly dispatched to the ad agencies. In 1988, a brochure put out by the advertising department informed its clients that the last game of "catch-up" was over: "*Libération* has acquired institutional status by creating stock-price pages every day." Giving the people a voice? It had changed. From now on, "*Libération* is framed for upwardly mobile professionals."

Libération did for France's cultural bourgeoisie what Commentary did for America's neoconservatives, providing a dressing room for free market attitudes.

After cultural leftism, the era of commercial leftism had arrived. *Libération*, "this Pravda for the new bourgeois" (Guy Hocquenghem), had converted the techniques formerly employed for subversive ends to the cause of buying and selling. In 1979, a collector's issue, whose cover page sported fine gilt edges, mocked investors worried about the spike in gold prices (September 19, 1979). In 1987, the newspaper was printed on blue paper – this time inspired by Jacques Séguéla to serve the advertising needs of a certain vacation club (February 9, 1987). Reeking of incense, the May 30, 1980, issue was intended as an ironic statement on the papal visit to France. Two weeks later, this same olfactory technique was used for a luxury perfume. Whether it was printed on cotton (cut by inmates of the Fleury-Mérogis prison) for the textile industry (October 8, 1986), wrapped in an opaque advertising blister, or subsidized by a mass retail chain, the cover of *Libération* was morphing into an advertising vehicle. With the servitude that this status implies. One year, to honor Fête de la Publicité (National Advertising Day), *Libération* published a supplement "advertising the advertisers" (October 18, 1996). Each agency was given one page. One of them went for the jugular, with an ad that read: "Advertising in the pages of *Libé*? Over my dead body!" – Serge July, 1973. To which was added, inside the red lozenge familiar to *Libé*'s readers: "Condolences."

Advertising in the newspaper was soon enhanced by advertising for the newspaper. "They call us leftists", cried the man at the helm in June 1979. "I believe it is therefore critical that we advertise for *Libération* to break this image". Persuaded early on that the competition between France's dailies would become brand warfare, *Libération's* management launched the paper's first advertising campaign in late December 1982. In the Paris métro, specially designed billboards reflected the faces of passing commuters, making it seem that they were on the front page of *Libération*. In his inimitable Volapük, Serge July noted: "The mirror reflects a multidimensional reality, which is constantly shifting, incongruous, surprising – in a word, news". Prop up the brand image, but also recruit more "readers of talent." Television ads were created for this purpose. One of them, which ran in 1987 on a show hosted by Michèle Cotta, presented the ideal female reader: "I started reading it three years ago", says the simpering "Félicity, Labrador breeder", "and I liked the tone. I like the way it can make me laugh or send me into a rage, capture my interest."

With the possible exception of "Félicity", nobody holds *Libération* to a higher standard than its immobile editor – whose main concern when Rothschild became the paper's owner in 2005 was to make sure he could keep his job until 2012. "I embody the values of *Libération*", he as-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sured us in the mid-1980s. Like Bernard Tapie incarnated Wonder batteries. These two emblematic French patrons turned stardom into a commercial strategy. And their admiration is mutual: the man whose career consisted basically of buying companies and then chopping them up into little pieces, invited July as a guest on his television program "Ambitions", to sing the praises of free trade and *Libération* (TF1, April 11, 1986). When Serge July burst into the circles of power, it aroused interest in *Libération* on the part of those who inhabit these circles. Shortly after the socialist victory in 1981, the former militant for the proletarian left was admitted to Siècle, the very select club whose monthly dinners bring together the political, economic, intellectual and media elite of France.

In 1986, July was sitting in the center of a small circle of virtuosos in the world of Parisian journalism. The newcomer adopted the local customs: he wrote an essay on the President of the Republic ("Les Années Mitterrand," 1986), earned homage for it from Alain Duhamel ("the most fashionable and original journalist on the Paris scene"). In between, the marketing weekly *Stratégies* named Serge July its "Man of the 80s" (December 1989), offering this summation of his career: "With this award, the symbol of lefty over-simplification practically becomes the symbol of the modern winner". Both guinea pig and trailblazer in the process of turning the patrons of print into media stars, Serge is a "modern winner". In the end, the only aftereffect of the strident fame of its editor is the nearly total personalization of *Libération*. Back in 1981, the last issue of the first series insisted on this point: "What was *Libération*? A team." That was then. Two decades after the introduction of advertising, *Stratégies* sums up the current situation: "*Libé*, which is celebrating its thirtieth anniversary, has finally achieved brand status" (September 25, 2003). Sartre would have been so proud...

* Street furniture and outdoor advertising billionaire Jean-Claude Decaux achieved fame in the 1980s as the mastermind behind the replacement of the public urinals in Paris by automated pay toilets. CP

Pierre Rimbert's *Libération, de Sartre à Rothschild* was published in November 2005 by *Raisons d'agir* (140 pages, 6 euros). Translation for CounterPunch by Margaret Ganong.

(**Gates** *continued from page 1*)

trolling, counter-terrorism, and narco-wars, have gradually eroded the *posse comitatus* line between soldiers and police to the point where Navy ships have been instructed to simply raise Coast Guard flags to legalize drug busts on the high seas, reports Kitfield. At the border with Mexico, history may be just one provocation away from transforming National Guard into Federal Police.

In the kind of pattern that tickles a paranoid fancy, the past few years of Texas experience have served Gates well. The Texas A&M University campus, with its military school origins exemplified by the Corps of Cadets, the military marching band, and the George Bush Presidential Library, is a cultural center for neo-Republicans and their ideologies. In College Station, one finds an overpowering Republicanism, not to be confused with your old Party of Lincoln, except that here is a power base well fitted to serve as command and control for a militarized Southern Front.

At the U.S. border with Mexico, history may be just one provocation away from transforming National Guard into Federal Police.

Indeed, the harshness of narco-violence at the Texas border has grown to a point impossible to ignore, and correlates with a general intensity of border experience. One hears stories of border travelers who are somewhat relieved to be picked up by the U.S. Border Patrol, since they no longer have to worry about falling prey to armed coyotes of the desert.

In this escalating milieu of militarization and violence, we find also a colossal milestone of privatization marked in late September by the awarding of a Secure Border Initiative (SBI) contract to Boeing. The behemoth military contractor will now outsource an array of border-keeping technologies, which include "relying on more than 300 radar towers along the borders, some supplemented with cameras developed by Israel's Elbit Systems Ltd. which can spot people nearly 9 miles away and vehicles at distances of up to 12 miles" (Word War 4 Report, Nov. 8).

As the Bush-led policy of never-ending war comes home to roost along the Rio Grande, we should worry about the commitments that will motivate the next Secretary of Defense, because this is the office that holds the center of gravity for the Bush administration.

As CIA chief Bill Casey's number two, Gates played an important role in one of the most famous sagas of narco-corruption of the 20th century, otherwise known as the Iran-Contra scandal of the mid-to-late 1980s, in Reagan time. Independent Counsel Lawrence E. Walsh reported that evidence "did not warrant indictment of Gates for his Iran-Contra activities or his responses to official inquiries". But the report did conclude that "Gates was close to many figures who played significant roles in the Iran-Contra affair and was in a position to have known of their activities." Walsh said flatly in his memoirs that in his confirmation hearings as CIA director in 1991, to the U.S. Senate , Gates' denials of any knowledge of Iran-contra crimes were not credible.

Central Intelligence Agency veteran Ray McGovern has reported watching his colleague Gates tailor substantive intelligence "to the recipe of whomever he reported to." This was the kind of intelligence that facilitated "budget-breaking military spending against an exaggerated Soviet threat that, in reality, had long since passed its peak." And now we are going to put this genius to work at the powder-keg border with Mexico?

For my part, I would like to remind whoever cares to listen that Gates is the college president who once appointed a blue ribbon committee to study the question of affirmative action and then suppressed the recommendations of that committee on his way to abolishing considerations of race in admissions decisions at Texas A&M.

The occasion for the policy review came during the summer of 2003, right after the U.S. Supreme Court had re-affirmed the constitutionality of using race and ethnicity in college admissions. For several years prior to that decision, Texas had been operating under the jurisdiction of the Fifth District and its renegade Hopwood ruling that had abolished affirmative action in the admissions process. In the 2003 Grutter decision, the Supreme Court laid down the kinds of careful criteria that would be required for considering race in admissions. Texas colleges generally returned to affirmative action using Grutter guidelines, including the Texas A&M College of Medicine.

(**Gates** *continued on page 6*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dylan in Winter

White Mule of the Apocalypse

By Daniel Wolff

He's a small pale man, dressed in black, like the rest of the band but clearly the leader: center stage, the one member whose outfit glistens with sequins, and the vocalist on every song. He plays the electric keyboards, standing sideways to the audience, which seems only right. He's approaching us at an angle: poker-faced, occasionally doing a swivel-hipped dance but showing little to no emotion. As a song ends, he'll sometimes turn more toward the crowd and, with one hand, give a jivey, palms down, "it's cool" sign, like he was calling someone safe at home.

We're not. Safe, that is. Or at home. We're listening to Bob Dylan play music of the apocalypse.

Through the evening-length concert, he wanders through various landscapes of disaster, making sly or somber comments, drawing attention to this crippled sister and that ruined highway. Tonight, as he sings a song off his latest CD, he repeats what sounds like a key phrase: "Ain't talking, just walking." Actually, he's talking – or, using words, anyway – a lot. In a guttural voice that's stronger than the one he uses to record, he spins out phrase after phrase, often hard to decipher and, when they're decipherable, rarely making what you might call sense. Instead, the words seem to ricochet off each other. As if the payoff wasn't meaning, but sparks.

For all that, it's the walking that matters – if by walking he means the action, the doing, the making of live music. For a couple of decades now, Dylan has led a rock-n-roll band through various sized venues from minor league ballparks to last night's City Center in New York.

The band's membership has changed, but the goal has remained consistent: a tight, entertaining, and mysterious show. He's got two main guitarists right now, at opposite sides of the stage, exchanging distant looks to make sure they've got their signals straight. The drummer tends to underscore the verses with soft, complicated rhythms played with feathery strokes, then sticks it to the chorus with high-hat and snare.

The bass, though, is the key. Even Dylan's folk tunes aren't folk tunes anymore: they've got a little funk at the bottom, or a little stride, or a touch of danceable swing. Meanwhile, there's a guy playing mostly inaudible violin, pedal steel and/or banjo, and Dylan playing equally inaudible keyboard. When he can be heard, the leader's turning out eccentric chords that don't propel the songs as much as they comment on them.

It's a jam band. Working off a rehearsed, if shifting, list of songs, the men play with the rhythm, sizzle stanza-long solos, and build to surprisingly showbiz endings: hotcha! A jam band is a heady, business-like thing. It's not looking to change your life, but to let you rave a little, and the crowd seems happy with that idea.

Some folks dance, others rock in their seats. The point is to have a good time, and if Dylan is the poet laureate of his generation (as an announcer intones when the band takes the stage), that's not allowed to get in the way. The musicians crank the often familiar songs in unfamiliar directions, and the party drives relentlessly forward.

Part of what's mysterious about the show is that it's simultaneously generous and withholding. Generous, if nothing else, because Bob Dylan remains out there: playing his songs, performing a couple of hours of music that range from early work ("Boots of Spanish Leather" last night) to his latest. He can't be doing this for money, can he? And he acts like he doesn't want or need the applause.

The music appears to be what he's been given to do and what he offers up – night after night, city after city – as a kind of reciprocal gift.

But since his stubborn, rueful vision is that things have been and are going to hell, there's no point in making attachments. Or being intimate with the audience. This is a working band, obviously pleased to entertain but, then, ready to pack up and move on. Dylan's been walking this walk so long that he seems to see the next stop before he's quite left this one. And the rest of the players take their cue from him: however deep the groove, they serve it up without trappings. Workmanlike.

One of the older and most telling songs Dylan did last night was "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right." In the original version (from more than forty years ago), there was a kind of tough guy sentimentality to the piece. It detailed the mistakes and emotional misunderstandings in an affair, before coming round to a chorus which spun with irony. Supposedly unhurt, the singer was also saying, "It isn't all right; we need to think; what are we doing to each other?"

In tonight's version, the words haven't changed but the arrangement has a different point of view. The harder, more driving rendition connects this list of wrongs to recent songs like "The Levee's Gonna Break" or "Highwater (For Charley Patton)."

Back then, it implies, he was on the dark side of the same road he's on now: the one that shows how the human species invariably screws up. Which takes the personal onus out of the song. It isn't a couple of kids hurting each other, anymore; it's the way the world works, and no one's to blame. So, when the chorus comes around, it's changed, too.

Grey-haired, in his spangly black suit, when Dylan leans forward to sing, "It's alright," he's almost comforting. Tender. The sky is falling, but don't think too much about it. Grab what you can – this beat, this moment – and walk on. CP

SUBSCRIPTION INFO

Enter/Renew Subscription here:

One year $40 Two yrs $70
($35 email only / $45 email/print)
One year institution/supporters $100
One year student/low income, $30
T-shirts, $17
Please send back issue(s)
_____ ($5/issue)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

_____

Payment must accompany order, or dial 1-800-840-3683 and renew by credit card. Add $12.50 for Canadian and $17.50 for foreign subscriptions. If you want Counter-Punch emailed to you please supply your email address. Make checks payable to: **CounterPunch**
Business Office

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**Gates** *continued from page 4*)

At the Texas A&M main campus, Gates appointed his own blue ribbon committee of professional administrators, chaired by Dean of Faculties Karan Watson, to write a report advising him what to do. On August 29, 2003, that committee returned a recommendation for resuming affirmative action in admissions in a way that would satisfy the Supreme Court.

A cover memo to the nine-page report acknowledged to Gates that the committee was listening when he suggested an emphasis on race-based recruitment: "We fully concur that altering the efforts in other areas must occur." However, the committee also firmly held to the position that Texas A&M should rejoin the world of affirmative action in admissions.

Texas legislators and Civil Rights organizations were caught by surprise on December 4, 2003, when President Gates won approval from the Texas A&M University System Board of Regents to voluntarily eliminate affirmative action. In a successful mission of diplomacy, Gates traveled to Austin to meet the legislators face-to-face.

After all, it was the Texas A&M Regents who had led the way in adopting affirmative action in the first place back in 1980, when they "voluntarily" adopted a "commitment to numerical objectives." In a 1980 memo to the Regents, Texas A&M Chancellor Frank Hubert explained that the Office of Civil Rights was taking a careful look at vestiges of segregation in Texas higher education. "If we can adopt this resolution and begin its good faith implementation, in the company of other major colleges and universities in Texas, this action may well enable us to manage our own affairs in the carrying out of various desegregation activities," Hubert wrote.

This is the context that gets forgotten in every public report about affirmative action at Texas A&M. Affirmative action in college admissions is a civil rights tool adopted for the purposes of civil rights enforcement in order to address vestiges of racial segregation.

In early 2004, the Texas Civil Rights Review obtained the suppressed Task Force report by way of the Texas Public Information Act, and despite press releases to hundreds of media outlets found not a single reporter interested in the history of a civil rights backlash in College Station.

Now that Gates is up for Pentagon leadership that will affect international rights, the question of his civil rights leadership in Texas becomes relevant outside of the Old South. Under these new circumstances we have a right to raise new questions, not only about his leadership priorities and the status of Pentagon influence in international rights, but also about the role that New Union Armies will play under the very likely chance that they expand law enforcement duties along a border where civil rights and human rights will demand domestic and international respect.

These questions deserve attention during open hearings on the Gates nomination that opened on Dec. 5, the day that marked the anniversary when Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his first civil rights speech to an overflowing audience in Montgomery, Alabama.

In fairness to Gates, we should note that his strategy of emphasizing race in recruitment rather than admissions has paid off in the short term. Still, the vestiges of segregation are a long way from being erased, and if the day should come when factual progress fails, and numbers stagnate (as they did this year) or even decline, we will be in position to remember that Robert W. Gates exercised his power to lead a policy retreat in Texas civil rights history – a retreat that was completely unnecessary and opposed by the professionals whose advice he chose to solicit.

In contrast, there are college presidents in Michigan who are now going to court to preserve affirmative action, even in the face of popular backlash. Last time around, when Michigan colleges preserved rights to affirmative action, in the landmark Grutter decision, they were backed by the Pentagon.

Do we want a Pentagon leader who will exercise his immense power to reverse civil rights principles in the name of policy expediency on the ground? The question has urgent relevance to the history that we are about to make in College Station, Texas, and elsewhere, both outside and along the borders of the U.S.A. CP

Greg Moses is editor of the *Texas Civil Rights Review* and author of *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Philosophy of Nonviolence.*

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
Don't forget to order your gift subscriptions to CounterPunch!
1(800) 840-3683

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED